United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Join the Pilot High Tunnels

2008 Farm Bill
Conservation Programs

OVERVIEW

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is conducting a 3-year high tunnel, or hoop house, pilot study. Agriculture producers can sign-up to participate in the high tunnel pilot project. Participants will receive financial and technical assistance to help NRCS test the conservation benefits and effects of high tunnels in a practical, real-world situation.

CONSERVATION

USDA announced the pilot project under the 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative. The high tunnel pilot study will help determine possible conservation benefits. High tunnels can extend the growing season and allow for lengthened local marketing of quality produce. Local marketing increases sustainability while lowering energy and transportation inputs. In arid climates, high tunnels may slow evaporation and decrease irrigated water use. In all cases, the tunnels may improve pest and nutrient management. High tunnels have applicability to all farms, but the extended growing season and steady income may offer advantages to small, limited resource, and organic farmers.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

High tunnels are greenhouse-like structures that modify the growing climate. This modification allows for tender, sensitive, and specialty crops like certain varieties of vegetables, herbs, berries, and others to grow where they otherwise may not. High tunnels are constructed of metal or plastic bow frames at least 6 feet in height, which are covered with a single layer of polyethylene and designed with many different nonelectrical venting options. For this pilot project, plants must be planted in the ground and not containerized.

Water runoff from high tunnels can cause erosion, pooling, and other environmental concerns. To address these concerns, conservation practices such as runoff management, irrigation, drain structures for water control, grassed waterways, crop rotation, and critical area planting may be installed. These additional practices will need to be planned and installed as a condition for the installation of a high tunnel. Additional practices that might be considered as part of a conservation plan include nutrient and pest management, cover crop, and irrigation water management.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

During the pilot project, financial assistance is limited to one high tunnel per operation. Successful applicants will receive cost share on one high tunnel, at approximately half the cost of the high tunnel; historically underserved customers can receive 75 or 90 percent cost share. The cost share amount is equated by square foot and has a maximum size of 2,178 square feet. Participating growers will help evaluate the effects of high tunnels on natural resources.

MORE INFORMATION

For application assistance, additional information on the California high tunnel pilot project, and other Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) initiatives contact your closest NRCS office. EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but each fiscal year has funding cutoff dates.

Detailed information and office locations can be obtained on the NRCS California website:
http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov

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